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INCREASING STUDENT-STUDENT INTERACTION IN ENGLISH CLASSES

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CHAPTER I

1. Interaction and its role in learning speaking communicatively

1.1 Defining interaction

A child starts interacting with other people since it is born. We all have to interact with other people for our whole lives. We interact every day and most of us probably know what to imagine under the term “interaction”. But how to define it?

Usually, when two people interact, one says or does something, the other reacts by saying or doing something else, then the first one says or does something more, etc. So the conclusion could be that interaction is a chain of actions and reactions. But it is more than that.

According to Malamah-Thomas (1987, p. 7), *“interaction is more than just action followed by reaction. Interaction means acting reciprocally, acting upon each other.”*

Similarly, Celce-Murcia (1989, p. 25) claims that *“human interaction is a process whereby two or more people engage in reciprocal action.”* This means that when two people interact, they must consider the other’s reactions and act upon them. If one acts and the other reacts, the first one cannot ignore the reaction as it becomes a stimulus for his own reaction.

“Interaction is a two-way process” (Malamah-Thomas, 1987, p.8) where speaking and writing on one side, and listening and reading on the other side are equally important skills.

In literature dealing with social psychology, interaction is seen as *“mutual active influence of persons, groups, and setting; by means of one’s own behaviour, one person causes change in the other person”* (Hartl, 1993, p.81, see appendix 1 for the Czech original). In other words, even one’s behaviour should be considered when speaking of interaction. It is not only a matter of what people say but also how they behave. By one’s own behaviour, one can influence other people’s behaviour during interaction. On the other hand, one’s own behaviour is also influenced. Although in literature of teaching foreign language methodology, the term interaction is usually understood as exchanges in the target language between learners, it should not be forgotten that learners are also human beings and the social aspect is always present.

As well as communication, interaction can be either verbal or non-verbal. Means of non-verbal interaction can be gestures, body language, or even physical actions. For example, imagine a child who tries to take a book away from his older brother just to get his attention

and involve him in interaction. The older brother might react verbally or non-verbally, but the start of this interaction was clearly non-verbal.

Verbal interaction can be divided further into written and oral interaction.

Surprisingly, people can interact without seeing or hearing each other. They can write messages or letters, leave notes, even a chat on the Internet is a kind of written interaction. In this paper, however, the attention will be focused only on oral interaction.

Consequently, the term interaction will be used in sense of oral interchanges between students where students influence each other's reaction by what they say. Thereby, interaction has much to do with communication so I decided to inquire their relationship in chapter 2.3.

1.2 Interaction in the classroom

What kinds of interaction are there in the classroom? The elements that can be combined are the following: the teacher, students, and the textbook (or better to say, the textbook writer). There can even be some interaction between the textbook writer on one side and students, or the teacher (or both at once) on the other side. As students have a chance to react to the textbook but there is no reaction on the other side, this option will be left aside as it is not exactly interaction in the sense of what was defined before. Then, there are students and the teacher left.

Let us deal with the possibilities including the teacher first. The teacher can interact with just one student, e.g. the teacher asks a question, gives instructions, praises, etc..., or, on the other hand, the interaction can be initiated by a student, e.g. by asking a question. Then, there can be interaction between the teacher and a group of students, e.g. during a competition between two teams. Finally, the teacher can interact with the whole class.

What are the options of combining only students? First, one student can interact with another. This is usually called pair work. Either there are several pairs interacting at the same time, or there can be one pair interacting in front of the rest of the class. Further, several students can interact with one another, or, from the viewpoint of an individual student, one student can interact with a group of students. This is group work. Finally, there is the possibility of one student interacting with the rest of the class. Although it is not very common, it can happen when e.g. one student gives a presentation. These are the options, but which of them are usual and which of them are good for learning languages?

Outside the classroom, in the 'real world', people interact for various reasons. Classroom interaction, however, has one main purpose, which is to promote students' learning.

In the past, learning a language meant learning primarily the structures; grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation. Students were not required to communicate. (This is called the grammar translation method.) Consequently, most of the interaction was done between the teacher and an individual student, or between the teacher and the whole class. The structure of that interaction was similar in many cases: teacher's action, then student's reaction, and finally teacher's feedback. I am convinced that this approach still appears in some classes in the Czech schools, as it was the only possible approach for many years and for some teachers, it must be difficult to change their way of teaching.

After 1989, Czech teachers finally had the opportunity to find out that this was not the only approach to language teaching. The aim of language teaching changed as well. Nowadays, the main goal of language teaching is communication; to develop communicative ability in the target language so that students would be able to use the language outside the classroom. Communication has become both the goal and the means of learning foreign languages. But how did this change of the goal influence interaction in the classroom?

Interaction in the classroom is not used only to prove knowledge of the language anymore; the goal is now also to use the language, to transmit a message in the target language. With communication as the goal, the pattern of the teacher interacting with just one student at a time becomes quite ineffective. There will probably be a wider variety of kinds of interaction, not just teacher-student interaction. Also, the structure of interaction should become similar to the structure of interaction outside the classroom. It should not be just action – reaction – feedback, but it should be richer, focusing not only on the form but on the meaning as well.

Also, the demand on students' interest will now be of crucial importance. As Rivers (1987, p. xiv) points out, “...*interaction takes place when interest (attention to the communicative act) is present. Where there is no interest...communication of personal messages does not take place. To promote interaction in another language, we must maintain a lively attention and active participation among our students.*” Similarly, Malamah-Thomas (1987, p.11) claims:” *Only where there is co-operation between both sides involved in the interaction can communication effectively take place, and learning occur.*”

Now the question is what kind of interaction would be the best to promote communication. “*People communicate most easily with those they have most in common*

with.” (Malamah-Thomas, 1987, p.13) I dare say that a student has most in common with other students, not with the teacher. If the teacher wants students to communicate in the target language, she should let them interact with each other. In my opinion, it is very natural for students to interact with someone of the same age and similar interests and problems. Therefore, in my project I decided to focus on student-student interaction. Here I would like to narrow the focus of my paper. I decided to explore the student-student interaction in activities in which students fulfil a meaningful task through interaction, and in which they have a reason to communicate with each other. This means that I will have to focus on communicative speaking activities, with the aim to get students to express themselves fluently, and convey the meaning of what they want to say effectively.

1.3 Communication and its relationship to interaction

The main purpose of learning a language is to communicate. When dealing with interaction, communication should not be omitted because, as it will be shown, the purpose of interaction is communication.

If we consider two people having a conversation, an urgent question arises. Are they interacting or are they communicating? Or are they doing both at once? To put the question more theoretically, what is the difference between communication and interaction? And what is the relationship between the two notions?

While interaction is a process of reciprocal actions, as mentioned above, “*communication is a system of giving and receiving information*” (Celce-Murcia, 1989, p.25). Again, it can be verbal or non-verbal, oral or written.

There are four basic elements of communication: the sender (the person who has something to say), the message (the meaning communicated), the channel (a telephone, a radio, a paper on which a letter is written, or just the space between two people) and the receiver (the person who gets the message) (Celce-Murcia, 1989, p.25). And where is the place of interaction? “*Transmitting and receiving messages take place in the frame of interaction; they are the interactive elements of communication.*” (Celce-Murcia, 1989, p.25) In other words, sending and receiving messages are interactive processes; it would be impossible to send or receive a message and not to interact. Therefore, “*there can be no communication without interaction.*” (Celce-Murcia, 1989, p.25) On the contrary, the other way round is possible. If someone transmits a message (which is an interactive process), but the other does not listen, or misunderstands the message, the communication fails to occur.

But still, there is some interaction! So, “*communication is the more embracing of the two concepts – it is both the goal of interaction and the result of successful interaction; interaction, on the other hand, is a necessary part of communication.*” (Celce-Murcia, 1989, p.26)

1.3.1 Communicative competence

When talking about communication, it is useful to realize what skills we need in order to communicate successfully. Surprisingly, it is not enough to know grammatical rules and be able to use them, as language is more than a sum of grammatical rules. It is more complicated. For example, there are various language functions, which can be expressed in various ways. Moreover, our choice of language depends on whom we talk to and in what situation. What skills, or strategies, do we then need to develop in order to communicate efficiently?

These skills are named ‘communicative competence’ and the term was defined by Brown (1994, p.227) as “*that aspect of our competence that enables us to convey and interpret messages and to negotiate meanings interpersonally*”

There are four parts of communicative competence: grammatical competence, discourse competence, sociolinguistic competence and strategic competence. (Brown, 1994, p.227-228)

Knowledge and ability to use grammatical rules is called ‘grammatical competence’. It includes “*knowledge of lexical items and of rules of morphology, syntax, sentence-grammar semantics, and phonology*”. (Canale and Swain, 1980, p.29)

The second competence relating to the linguistic system is called ‘discourse competence’. It is the ability to connect sentences in a meaningful way so that the whole makes sense. “*Discourse competence is concerned with intersentential relationships*” (Brown, 1994, p.228) whereas grammatical competence deals with grammatical rules within one sentence.

The next two parts of communicative competence deal more with functions of language. “*Sociolinguistic competence is the knowledge of the sociocultural rules of language and of discourse.*” (Brown, 1994, p.228) It involves the choice of appropriate language in a particular situation depending on who we talk to, where, and what was said before. For example, if one talks to a friend, it is appropriate to say: “Lend me your pen!” while using the same request to a complete stranger would be somewhat inadequate. Instead,

it would be more appropriate to say something like: “ Excuse me, would you mind lending me your pen?”

The last competence is called ‘strategic’ and it includes *“the verbal and nonverbal communication strategies that may be called into action to compensate for communication breakdowns in communication due to performance variables or due to insufficient competence”*. (Canale and Swain, 1980, p.30) In short, it is the ability to keep going in conversation even with limited knowledge, to overcome a breakdown in communication, or to be able to express one’s message even with a lack of vocabulary.

I think these skills are very useful even in real life and it could be profitable for learners to acquire such skills (although they do not need to know the names of the skills or the theory around it). Communicative competence could help them to avoid being unintentionally impolite or being misunderstood; it could also help them to become more efficient talkers even with limited language.

1.4 Reasons to speak

As it was pointed out before, the main goal of learning a foreign language is to be able to use the language for communication. If students are to use the language in the classroom, it is obvious that they need to have a reason to do so.

Outside the classroom, people communicate for various reasons. *“They may want to charm their listeners, they may want to give some information or express pleasure...In each of these cases they are interested in achieving this communicative purpose – what is important is the message they wish to convey and the effect they want it to have.”* (Harmer, 1991, p.46)

There is always a good reason to speak; there is always something the speaker wants to say. On the other hand, the part of the listener is equally important. He must have a desire to listen; he must be interested in what the speaker is saying.

Usually, the listener is interested in the conversation when there is an information gap between the speaker and the listener. The speaker has some information that the listener does not know and wants to know. The communication between them takes place in order to bridge the information gap. Such a situation should be created also in the classroom.

Harmer (1991, p.48) affirms: *“In the classroom we will want to create the same kind of information gap if we are to encourage real communication.”* If the teacher asks students just ‘to practise sentences’, they will not understand why they should do that as there will not be any communicative purpose. If there is a lack of purpose in speaking, soon there will be a

lack of interest and motivation. Also, students might miss the link between classroom practice and the real use of the language (and therefore regard the language they learn as useless). Therefore, students should be involved in activities with a communicative purpose as often as possible.

1.5 Two aspects of the spoken language

When the teacher engages her students in a speaking activity, she has to know whether the aim of the activity is to get students to produce correct sentences or to get them to express their ideas with all the language they have as quickly as they can. These two aspects of the spoken language are called accuracy and fluency.

“Accuracy involves the correct use of vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation” (Gower, Phillips, and Walters, 1995, p. 99). Students develop their ability to be accurate in activities that are usually called ‘controlled’. In these activities, the teacher carefully controls and corrects everything students say in order to reduce the number of mistakes to a minimum. The main aim is to get students to produce a grammatically correct piece of language. Learning accuracy is traditionally associated with drills and non-communicative activities. However, there is no reason why an activity focused on accuracy should not be communicative as well. Even in early stages of learning, when students practise quite short chunks of language, they should use the language in a meaningful way rather than just repeat empty phrases for no reason. Students can try to produce correct language and communicate at once. *“To a large extent, this will depend on how the teacher presents the activity and whether the learner expects his performance to be evaluated according to its communicative effectiveness, its grammatical accuracy, or both.”* (Littlewood, 1981, p.16)

Fluency can be described as *“the ability to keep going when speaking spontaneously”* (Gower, Phillips, and Walters, 1995, p. 100). It is the ability to communicate successfully, to express oneself, to get the message across. The activities in which fluency is the goal are called ‘fluency activities’, ‘free practice’, etc. The aim of fluency activities is to *“develop a pattern of language interaction within the classroom which is as close as possible to that used by competent performers in normal life”* (Brumfit, 1984, p.69). In these activities, students should be allowed to choose the language that would express the intended meaning themselves.

If students are to speak fluently, they should not be interrupted by the teacher's correction every now and then. The teacher still hopes that they would express themselves accurately, but it is more important to let them talk without any interruption.

How are these two types of activities connected? They are actually two stages of the learning process. At the early stage, when students meet a new item of language, they first learn to understand it and produce it correctly. Accuracy is now the more important element of the two. Students might fix a mistake if they do not focus on accuracy.

. The second, 'free use' stage, enables students to use all the language they know in a similar way as it is used in a normal conversation. Now, the activity is focused on the meaning rather than the form.

These two stages of learning speaking are equally important as neither of them would work well without the other. Although some teachers might think that their work is finished after providing students with a lot of controlled practice, my experience with learning German persuaded me that it is not enough. On the contrary, it persuaded me that the fluency phase is equally important for developing the ability to speak a foreign language.

I learned German for four years. Our German teacher taught us in a way that was very similar to the grammar-translation method. We did a lot of grammar exercises and had a lot of controlled practice, but there was not a single communicative activity during these four years. In the end, I was able to pass the leaving exam as I knew all the grammar and I learned the topics by heart. But when I went to Germany with a choir and we stayed with a German family for two days, I was lost. I did not understand what they were saying because it was too quick. If I finally understood (after three repetitions), I was struggling hard to say more than just "ja" or "nein". I was unable to use my knowledge in order to communicate.

This experience with learning German influenced my approach towards teaching (and learning) languages a lot. If the aim of learning a foreign language is to be able to communicate in the target language, it is necessary that the teacher employs both controlled practice and free practice in the classroom.

1.6 Advantages of student-student interaction in the classroom

In the previous paragraphs, the area of my investigation was narrowed to such activities that are focused on fluency and in which students interact with each other. Focus on fluency in these activities enables students to use all the language they know for communicative

purposes. It also helps students to link the language they learn with the language that is used in the real world. The use of student-student interaction makes it easier and natural for students to communicate. In addition to this, these activities bring along some other advantages into the classroom.

1.6.1 Increasing student talking time

The first benefit of using student-student interaction in the classroom is obvious. Each student gets much more speaking practice than he or she would get through teacher-student interaction. *“Long and Porter (1985) report the striking fact that each EFL student has only 30 seconds per lesson to practise their English in a teacher-fronted class of 30 EFL students.”* (Ilola, Power, Jacobs, 1994, p.6) Even if there are only 15 students in the classroom, they get much more speaking practice if they work in pairs for just five minutes than they will get during the rest of the lesson.

1.6.2 Activating the learner

The second advantage, which makes the use of student-student interaction an effective learning tool, is students' active participation. When students interact with each other, trying to complete a task together, they are much more active than they would be if they were just sitting and listening to the teacher. Klippel (1984, p.5) suggests that *“learning is effective if the learners are actively involved in the process.”* If we want to learn to swim, we have to get wet; if we want to learn to ride a bike, we must get onto it and try. There is certainly no reason why it should be different with learning a language.

1.6.3 Peer teaching

When students work together, there is also space for peer teaching. This means that students learn from each other. In every class, there are some good students and some worse students. Why could not the better ones help the worse ones? When working in a pair, a student can immediately ask his peer about the meaning of an unknown word and he does not need to wait for the teacher to come. This is profitable for all sides. It saves the teacher's time and effort, it gives the stronger student a feeling of satisfaction that he was helpful and raises his self-confidence. It is better for the weaker student as well. The weaker student might feel

ashamed to ask the teacher and admit that he does not know something at once. It is less threatening to ask a friend. This helps to create the feeling of interdependence among students and increase responsibility for each other.

1.6.4 Social aspects

In the past, students were often prohibited to interact with each other. They were expected to interact only with the teacher, or work on their own. However, Kratochvíl (1998, p. 10, see appendix 1) suggests that e “*prohibition of students’ mutual contact during the lessons has negative influence not only on the overall social life of the class, but also helps negative social tendencies to rise.*” Therefore, it is very unwise to prohibit students from the contact with each other as it is clear that it is much more comfortable and natural for students to learn through an interaction with their peers than with the teacher.

The class is not only a sum of students; it is a social group as well. If students are asked to work together, they do not only learn the target language, but they also develop their social skills. “*Cooperation requires people to understand and adjust to each other, to learn to respect the common goal, the rules of the game, etc.*” (Čáp, Mareš, 2001, p.56, see appendix 1)

Further, using student-student interaction in the classroom can contribute to the improvement of personal relationships among students. Activities in which students communicate with each other, share their ideas and try to complete the task together provide “*opportunities for positive personal relationship to develop among the learners...*” (Littlewood, 1981, p.18). This can further positively influence the overall classroom spirit.

If students work in groups, it can influence their self-esteem. “*Research appears to show that the group outcome of any task or activity has an effect upon individuals’ perceptions of their own ability and their feelings of satisfaction and self-esteem. Group success can help to improve an individual’s poor self-esteem...*” (Williams and Burden, 1997, p.193) This is particularly important for the weaker students as they might perform better with the help of the group than they would perform on their own. They are also less likely to give up the task completely if they are stuck, because they would spoil the whole group’s work, not just their own.

Apart from developing social skills, improving personal relationships and raising self-esteem, the use of student-student interaction in the classroom can also enhance the feeling of students’ interdependence and responsibility for the others.

As shown above, there is a lot of advantages of using student-student interaction in the classroom, such as increasing student talking time, activating the student, peer teaching, and some social benefits. In addition to all this, it adds variety to the classroom, as the tasks can be very variable and imaginative. Finally, it gives the teacher time to listen to the students without disturbing them, to reflect on what the students have already managed to learn and what areas of language need more practicing.

For all these reasons, I think that using student-student interaction is a very good way of teaching and learning a language.

2. Methodology of speaking activities

2.1 Preparing a speaking activity before the lesson

When the teacher wants to prepare a speaking activity, first she must think about several things. No matter whether she decides to adapt an activity from some resource or she decides to create an activity herself, the first element she should consider are students.

2.1.1 Students' factors

Whether the activity that the teacher chooses or develops for her students will be suitable for them depends on a lot of factors related to students. The teacher has to consider their age, their level of English, their motivation to learn English, their interests, and their social background. Different factors will probably influence different aspects, or elements of the activity that the teacher chooses to bring in the classroom.

The age of students can influence the length of the activity. As children have a short span of attention and they need a change more often, it is advisable to keep activities short with them. With older students, activities can be longer. Age can also influence the type of task the teacher will choose for her students. Children need a lot of games and activities that are playful and enjoyable. With teenagers and adults, the teacher can venture at more serious activities, such as discussion. Age, together with students' interests, will also affect the topic of the activity. Students' interests can be very variable and it is up to the teacher to get to know her students and find out what they like. Still, it can be said that young learners will probably be interested in such topics as animals, jokes, funny or strange things, or curiosities.

On the other hand, teenagers are often interested in music, popular singers, girls become interested in clothes whereas boys are often interested in computers and computer games.

Students' level of English will influence what language will be practised during the activity and the aims of the activity. Also, this factor can influence the length of the activity. With elementary students, the teacher will probably want to introduce relatively easy and short activities, which these students can manage. With more advanced students, the activities can be longer and the language can be more complicated.

Even students' motivation to learning English should be considered. If their intrinsic motivation is low, it is more important to make the task for students enjoyable than it would be with highly motivated students. The teacher can prepare for example problem-solving activity to involve students with low motivation. Moreover, the teacher can encourage them by employing them in easy tasks in which they can succeed.

Depending on a concrete situation, the teacher might need to consider some other factors. Sometimes, the choice of the activity will depend on such a factor as the size of the class. For example, if the class is too big, it might take too long to organise group work, therefore the teacher might prefer to employ pair work.

2.1.2 Elements of an activity

With the students' factors in mind, the teacher has to consider what elements should be included in the lesson plan. Gower, Phillips, and Walters (1995, p.102) suggest that before the lesson, the teacher should work out the aims of the activity, estimate the time it will take, prepare the instructions, and try to predict any possible problems. Also, the teacher should prepare the materials.

According to Nunan (1989, p. 10), a task consists of five basic components. First, there must be some kind of goal, from which the input and the activity arise. Finally, there are roles for the teacher and learners.

"Goals are the... intentions behind any given learning task." (Nunan, 1989, p.48)
They answer the question why the teacher wants to involve her students in the task. There are various types of goals. Most often, teachers are aware of goals connected with the development of students' skills and their knowledge and ability to use the language. However, there might be other goals as well, for example learning how to learn, arising cultural awareness, improving the classroom atmosphere, and so on. (Nunan, 1989, p.49)

“Input refers to the data that form the point of departure for the task” (Nunan, 1989, p.53) In my opinion, this means that input is any kind of material that introduces the topic of the task and provides students with something to talk about or manipulate. Input can be verbal (newspaper extracts, memo notes, letters, shopping lists,...) or non-verbal (photographs, picture sequence, ...)

An activity is initiated by the input. *“...activity...is in some way derived from the input and...sets out what the learners are to do in relationship with the input.”* (Nunan, 1989, p. 10) For example, if the input is represented by a questionnaire on bad habits, the activity for learners can be to ask and answer questions about their bad habits.

Finally, there are teacher and learner roles. According to Nunan, (1989, p.79) *“role refers to the part that learners and teachers are expected to play in carrying out learning tasks.”* The opinions about what the learner role should be vary according to the teaching method. For example, in communicative language teaching *“a learner has an active negotiative role; should contribute as well as receive.”* (Nunan, 1989, p. 80)

Teacher and learner roles are closely connected. To a large extent, the character of learner role depends on what the teacher expects and allows students to do. The teacher plays different roles, which will be discussed in 2.2.1. Nevertheless, if she is too active in her role, there is a danger that she would do all the work instead of students.

So far, the terms ‘task’ and ‘activity’ were taken from Nunan. From the definitions above, it is clear that ‘task’ is a broader term, whereas an ‘activity’, describing what students actually do during the task, is included in the task. However, different authors use these terms in a different way. For example, Crookes and Chaudron (1991) state that activity is *“a general term for the units of which a lesson consists.”* (p. 50) and, also, it is *“a broader term, with ‘task’ applying to a separable element of a lesson, which is primarily geared to practising language presented earlier, usually involving students working with each other, and which has a specific objective.”* (p. 51) In this diploma project, the terms ‘task’ and ‘activity’ will be used in that way.

2.1.3 Interesting topic

It is unnecessary to discuss whether an activity does or does not need an interesting topic, as it certainly does. *“Student motivation and performance are dependent to a large extent on the interest and enjoyment generated by the activity.”* (Ur, 1981, p.15) The question is what topics are interesting for students.

According to Ur (1981, p.16), there are two approaches towards this question; “*one claims that the closer discussion material or role-play situations are to the students’ own circumstances, the more interested they will be; and the other, that the more imaginative and exotic the subject, the more excited and stimulated the participants.*” It is possible that the topics which employ imagination will work well particularly with younger learners while older students might consider topics such as “Interview with a Martian” childish. Whether students will be interested in an exotic or in a familiar topic may also depend on a concrete class, as each class is different.

Lewis and Hill (1985, p. 119) suggest that perhaps it is easier to get students say something about ordinary, everyday topics such as a TV programme than serious topics such as pollution or the role of women as students might not know what to say about it even in their own language. “*...it is frequently easier to stimulate comment from a class about less serious topics. Rather surprisingly, it is often easiest of all to stimulate comment about something which is, intrinsically, totally unimportant.*” (Lewis and Hill, 1985, p. 119)

Nevertheless, the teacher can start with activities that make students talk about themselves and find out about their interests during these activities.

2.1.4 Real-like situations

If the main goal of learning and teaching English is to be able to communicate, it should be reflected even in the situations that the teacher uses to create learning tasks for students. These situations should be as similar to the situations students may once encounter in real life as possible so that students see the link between what they learn (and how they learn it) and what happens outside the classroom.

Let us consider an activity, in which each student in a pair gets a picture. The two pictures are nearly the same, but there are ten differences. Student’s task is to find the differences by describing the picture to each other, not looking at each other’s picture. Although it is a very useful way to create an information gap and practise some specific structures, it is not very realistic considering the situation outside the classroom. In a real situation, the two pictures would probably be compared by placing them next to each other and finding the differences visually. On the other hand, if students are asked to role-play a dialogue between a customer and a shop assistant, there is a possibility that they might once get into the same situation.

Tudor (2001, p.114) suggests:

“If students can perceive a clear link between the communicative activities being practised in the classroom and the situations in which they will or may have to use the language, there is a good chance that the ideal of the communicative classroom as a preparation for language use outside the classroom will become a reality.”

If the situations students are put into (and therefore the tasks they are asked to do) are similar to real situations (and tasks) they become more meaningful for students as they see that these situations are not something that the teacher has made up, but something that really happens.

2.2 Making activities well-working in the classroom

The success of a speaking activity is not only a matter of students being able to express themselves. To a large extent, it also depends on the teacher's ability to organize the activity properly. There are many things that are not connected with students' knowledge of the language and still can influence the whole process. Do students understand their task? Do they know what the teacher expects them to do? What is the best grouping and seating arrangement? What is the role of the teacher during the activity? These questions will be discussed in the next few paragraphs.

2.2.1 Stages of a speaking activity

In a speaking activity, three main stages can be distinguished. In the first one, which can be called 'introductory', the teacher presents and explains the activity, gives instructions, and organizes the classroom. In the second stage students work on their task while the teacher monitors, and, finally, in the third stage the teacher provides feedback.

Stage 1 – lead in

This part of stage one alone includes several different phases. First of all, the teacher has to introduce the topic of the activity. This can be done with visuals, with a very short story, or a short discussion with the whole class, and so on. The teacher should now attract students' interest and also help them *“to relate the topic to their own interests and*

experience.” (Gower, Phillips, Walters, 1995, p. 103) This is time for the students to think about the topic and get used to it.

Next, students should be provided with some input. The teacher should remind students of any structures they might need and supply them with useful vocabulary. This can be done as a whole class activity before setting the task, especially if the language necessary for the speaking task is predictable. For example, if students are going to practise language that appears in everyday situations such as buying food or posting a letter, it is easy to predict what a customer or a clerk will say. In this case, the teacher can elicit and put some useful phrases on the black board and leave them there for reference.

On the other hand, in some imaginative tasks the language that students will need can be unpredictable. For example, students are asked to imagine themselves on a ship which is sinking. There is a boat, but it is too small for everybody. Each student has to defend his right to be in the boat. In this task, the teacher can give students some phrases, but they might wish to say something else as well and it is impossible for the teacher to predict all the language they might need. Then, it might be better to explain the task first and then give students some time to prepare, make notes, find necessary vocabulary in their dictionaries, and so on.

Also, input can be presented with any kind of written material that students get so that they have something to remind them the language they will need. For example, in an information gap activity, they can get a worksheet with clues that help them to create questions.

Setting up the activity includes explaining the aim of the activity and giving clear instructions about what each student should do. Why giving instructions is extremely important will be explained in the next paragraph.

Stage 1 - giving clear instructions

“Any pair work or group work activity can lead to chaos if it is not properly organized.” (Porter-Ladousse, 1987, p.12) If students are not sure about what they should do, they will not speak and even the most interesting activity in the world is worth nothing. Therefore, giving clear, comprehensible, and well-ordered instructions is extremely important. That is why the teacher should do all she can to make students understand what their task is.

Especially for a beginning teacher, it is very helpful to write the instructions in advance. When she has time to think about the instructions, she can sequence them well, and

make them short and simple. Nevertheless, even doing this may not ensure the success in the classroom if students do not listen. So first of all, the teacher must obtain students' attention.

A useful way to make the instructions even more obvious is to demonstrate and give examples. The teacher can get a good student to show with her what the conversation should look like. For example, before the teacher gets students to role-play a conversation in a shop, she can take the role a shop assistant, ask a good student to be the customer, and they can perform the conversation in front of the class.

The last important thing to do is to make sure that everyone has understood the instructions. The teacher can ask a student or two to translate the instructions, or she can ask simple questions such as: "Lenka, are you going to show your picture to Petr?" to see whether they have understood.

If the instructions are too complicated, it is advisable to consider whether giving instructions in English would not take too long. In this case, it is probably better to explain the activity in Czech and spend the time in some better way.

Stage 1 - organizing pair work and group work

The next step the teacher has to make is to organize an appropriate arrangement of the class. For a speaking activity, it is usually pair work or group work.

The use of pair work and group work has recently become popular in Czech education. The idea of having ten students talking instead of one by mere putting students in pairs is quite tempting. Along with increasing the amount of students who talk, there are some other advantages such as peer teaching, co-operation, students' independence and responsibility. These advantages were discussed in chapter 1.6.

The easiest way to organize pair work is to ask students to work with the person they sit with. This is very quick and it does not interrupt the flow of the lesson. On the other hand, if students are asked not to show each other their handouts, this is not the best arrangement. It is a better idea to ask half of students to turn around and work with students behind them so that they face each other and there is a desk between them.

Sometimes, the teacher might find it helpful to put certain students together. If a weak student is in a pair with a strong student, the strong one can help the weak one. On the other hand, the teacher can sometimes decide to put the weak together and the strong together so that each pair can communicate on their own level and in their pace. In this case, the teacher should consider giving students tasks of different difficulty according to their levels.

Otherwise, the strong pairs would be quicker and they would end up with nothing to do by the end of the activity.

Another possibility of putting students in pairs can be letting them make pairs with their friends. This could make the activity more pleasant for students, but the teacher must be sure that none of students will be left alone as the class outcast.

Conversely, the teacher can offer students opportunity to get to know each other better by putting together students that are not friends.

When discussing organization of group work, the first issue to consider is the size of groups. Both bigger and smaller groups bring certain advantages. In bigger groups, more original ideas and more different opinions to discuss will probably arise. On the other hand, the amount of talk each student gets will be greater in smaller groups.

It is also a good idea to consider the type of activity when deciding about the number of students in each group. *“Where decisions have to be taken as a result of the activity it is probably a good idea to have an odd number in each group since in that way a split decision is impossible.”* (Harmer, 1991, p.246) But sometimes, the number of students in each group can be simply influenced by the number of students in the classroom. For example, if there are 25 students in the classroom, it will probably be best to put them in groups of five.

As with pair work, the teacher can put students in groups randomly, or she can decide to put certain students together for some purpose. If weak and strong students are together in each group, there is an opportunity for peer teaching and, in addition, each group has equal chances to complete the task successfully. Nevertheless, there is a danger that the strong students will do all the work and the weak ones will not join the activity. For this reason, it might sometimes be better to put students of the same level together while giving each group a task according to their ability. This could be more motivating for all students.

When forming groups, the teacher can also decide to appoint different roles. There can be a group leader in each group. He is responsible for completing the task and he also has to organize the group's work. Next, there can be a group secretary that notes down the group's ideas, or whatever else. These roles can be appointed by the teacher or the group can divide them among the members themselves.

If students have to move, the teacher should also remember to tell them what to take with them (pens, books, etc...) before they make groups. (Underwood, 1987, p.78) Otherwise, they would have to go back and the whole organization would take more time.

A very helpful technique mentioned by Scrivener (1994, p.60) that increases student talking time is called 'pyramid discussion'. A simple problem is introduced. First, students are

asked to reflect on it individually, and then they compare their ideas in pairs. After reaching some kind of consensus in pairs, they are put into groups of four and, again, they have to reach an agreement. At last, the problem is discussed with the whole class. The main advantage of this technique is that *“it gives students time to rehearse their arguments in smaller groups before facing the whole class.”* (Scrivener. 1994, p.60)

Some teachers are not willing to use pair work and group work, as they fear that certain problems would appear. Above all, there are mainly concerns about too much noise and about students making mistakes without being corrected.

It is natural that students will make mistakes as they are learning the language. But still, it is always better for them to speak with mistakes than not to speak at all. In this case, the fact that students are able to keep talking with some degree of fluency and they are able to convey their ideas is more important than accuracy. Moreover, the mistakes they make can be dealt with later.

Another concern is about the level of noise. It is obvious that 20 speaking students will make much more noise than just one. As long as they are talking in English, it is all right provided it does not disturb any other class. *“If the noise rises to excessive levels then the teacher can simply stop the activity, explain the problem and ask students to continue more quietly.”* (Harmer, 1991, p.244)

Stage 2 - role of the teacher

In the second stage, students work on their own in pairs or groups. However, this does not mean that the teacher should sit down and do nothing. The main role of the teacher is to monitor how students are getting on. This should be done tactfully so that it does not disturb students. If the teacher tries to interfere, it will probably discourage students and it will also make them more dependent on the teacher. *“The more I [the teacher] help, the more I make the task less challenging for the students, the more they will lean on me.”* (Scrivener, 1994, p.68) The teacher's role is not to control the process, but just to walk from one group to another, listen, and make sure that everyone is doing what they are supposed to do. In addition, monitoring enables the teacher to give students feedback later.

The only time when the teacher is allowed to intervene is when students are confused about what to do or when they start talking about something else. In this case, the teacher acts as a prompter, she encourages students to carry on and gives help. Again, *“the role of prompter has to be performed with discretion for if teachers are too aggressive they start to*

take over from the students, whereas the idea is that they should be helping them only when it is necessary." (Harmer, 1991, p.241)

Also, the teacher acts as a resource. If students miss some vocabulary, it is quicker to ask the teacher than to look it up in the dictionary. In this way, it is important for students to have the teacher near. However, the more help the teacher gives, the more dependent on her students are, so the idea is to give help only when really necessary.

Another possibility for the teacher is to take part in the activity herself. According to Harmer (1991, p.241), *"there is no reason why the teacher should not participate as an equal in an activity especially where activities like simulations are taking place."* Only the teacher should make sure that she would not dominate the activity and thus discourage most of students to make contributions. Nevertheless, I agree with Klippel (1984, p.8) that *"if the teacher joins the activity, she will then no longer be able to judge independently and give advice and help to other groups, which is the teachers major role if she does not participate directly."* For this reason, it is preferable for the teacher to keep to the role of a mere observer in order to be able to assess the activity and not to discourage students by her presence.

When monitoring, the teacher should also watch how far students got so that she can *"stop the work at an appropriate moment"*. (Underwood, 1987, p.79) It would not be wise to *"let activities drag on with some students getting bored."* (Underwood, 1987, p.79)

Stage 3 - giving feedback

In the third stage, the teacher has to give students feedback about the communication that occurred during the activity. She should *"indicate how each person communicated,...how fluent each was, how well they argued as a group, and so on."* (Gower, Phillips, Walters, 1995, p. 103) Also, she should signify whether students completed the task successfully. First, she can get each group or pair to report what they have done. In problem solving activity all groups should report about their solution and the teacher should then give the right one, if there is any right one.

After that, the class can deal with some mistakes that occurred during stage two. As suggested in the previous paragraph, it is not advisable for the teacher to correct students' mistakes during the activity. If students were ceaselessly interrupted by the teacher during a discussion or a role-play, *"the effect might well be to destroy the conversational flow."* (Harmer, 1998, p.94) On the other hand, some students might be afraid that they would make mistakes and nobody would correct them. In this case, it is a good idea to *"explain to these*

students that errors will be dealt with” (Porter-Ladousse, 1987, p.15). In the beginning of the activity, the teacher can explain to students that she will walk round the class and listen to them while they perform the task and that they will work on their mistakes together afterwards.

Also, it is important to decide whether all mistakes should be dealt with. It is probably useless to deal with a mistake done by just one student. On the contrary, the class should pay attention to mistakes that a lot of students have made. If a half of the class keeps repeating the same mistake, it is probably worth spending some time on it.

Furthermore, if students have recently learned something and they still make mistakes, it is a signal for the teacher that she and students should spend some more time dealing with it. These mistakes must be corrected after the activity. In this way, communicative activities provide a very valuable feedback both for the teacher and students about recently learned material.

Another decision that the teacher has to make is when to correct the mistakes. It can be done right after the activity as a part of feedback, or the teacher can delay it and incorporate it into the next lesson. The latter solution is perhaps better when some complicated problems that will require more time occur.

Next issue is who should correct the mistakes. *“We know that peer-correction and self-correction are more effective than teacher correction.”* (Celce-Murcia, 1989, p.29) Therefore, the teacher should always try to get students correct the mistakes themselves rather than do it herself. She can simply write some incorrect sentences on the blackboard and ask students to correct it. A bit of a contest can be added if the teacher includes some correct sentences, divides the class into two teams that are asked to bet on the correctness of the sentences. (If the sentence is not correct, they have to correct it, of course.)

If the teacher decides to deal with the mistakes in the next lesson, she can *“invent and write out a story that includes a number of errors she overheard during the activity.”* (Scrivener, 1994, p. 68) In the next lesson, students read the story and try to find and correct the mistakes in pairs or groups.

In spite of the need to correct students’ mistakes, the teacher should also remember to appreciate students’ effort as a part of feedback. It is important to give positive as well as negative feedback so that students do not get the impression that all they said was wrong.

2.2.2 Keeping the language English

It is obvious that a speaking activity provides the most profit to students if they are speaking English. This is quite easy to do in a multilingual class as English is the only means of communication. However, nearly all the classes are monolingual in the Czech Republic and the danger of students using their own language instead of English arises. Even though they know that they are in an English lesson, the students sometimes cannot resist using their own language. For example, if students want to say something important quickly, or they get too involved in what they are saying, they will easily switch into their native language.

First of all, the teacher should explain to students why it is so important that they do their best not to use their mother language when completing the task. *“Teachers should try to get their students’ agreement that overuse of their own language means that they will have less chance to learn English; that using their own language during speaking activities denies them chances for rehearsal and feedback.”* (Harmer, 1998, p.130) It is also advisable to explain to students that the main aim of this type of activity is that they manage to express themselves in English even if they are not always correct. They should know that they do not need to worry about the mistakes too much.

It might also be helpful to *“give the students a reason for using English in the completion of a task.”* (Nolasco and Arthur, 1987, p.82) This means that a purposeful task makes students more willing to complete it. Moreover, if there is some other reason why it should be done in English, it is even more motivating. For example, if students play a role of a reporter that interviews a famous person (another student playing the role) and they know that they will be asked to write an article about the famous person in English afterwards, they are more prone to ask the questions in English. Generally, if students know that they will have to report about the results of their work in English, they are more likely to do the task in English.

If the students are not used to talking in English, it is advisable to start with short and easy tasks. *“It is important not to be too ambitious in the early stages.”* (Nolasco, Arthur, 1987, p.82) When students get used to these kinds of activities, they can be exposed to longer or more difficult tasks.

During the activity, the teacher should keep reminding students to use English. If she keeps encouraging them all the time, they will gradually change their attitude and in the end they will do their best to keep the language English. Wingate (1993,p.23) even suggests that *“in groups the students elect or appoint a monitor whose job it is to keep that group speaking*

English.” Also, the teacher should not forget to “*praise students who make effort to use English and who do not easily revert to the mother tongue.*” (Nolasco, Arthur, 1987, p.82)

Finally, it is helpful to “*create an English environment*”(Harmer, 1998, p.130). There is a contradiction when the teacher uses the mother tongue herself and then asks students to talk only in English and they might well ask why they should speak English if their teacher does not. Therefore, “*teachers themselves should speak English for the majority of the time so that,...,the students are constantly exposed to how English sounds, and what it feels like.*” (Harmer, 1998, p.130) Also, English environment can be created by putting some posters with vocabulary and English materials on the walls (if it is possible).

In case that the teacher manages to make students feel comfortable about using English, give purpose to the tasks she asks them to do, and make the class an English speaking corner, it is much easier for students to keep speaking English and the speaking activities then become a very helpful and worthwhile part of the lesson.

2.3 Kinds of communicative speaking activities

In all of the following kinds of speaking activities, students are asked to interact in order to achieve real communication. The target language is used as a means of communication although the variety of language may sometimes be restricted, especially with students at lower levels. Yet, real communication and fluency remains the main goals of these activities.

It is important that these activities are meaningful; students have a real purpose to use the language; they do not just practise some particular items of the language. This helps to keep students involved in the task. Involvement on the side of students is another important feature of these activities. If students do not want to speak, they will not speak, and the activity falls flat. Therefore, the topic of the activity must match with students` interests.

Different resources mention various kinds of speaking activities such as information gap, surveys, discussion, role-play (Harmer, 1998, p. 88-92), reaching a consensus, relaying instructions, communication games, problem solving, talking about yourself, simulation (Harmer, 1991, p. 122-132), and to add the list, drama games, and guided improvisations (Scrivener, 1994, p. 69). However, some of these kinds overlap each other, so the next sections will focus on the main ones only.

2.3.1 Information and opinion gap activities

In an information gap activity, students have to share information in order to complete the task. Either one student has all the information and the other has none, or they both have different parts of information and by sharing it they get the whole 'picture'.

Information gap activities are usually carried out in pairs, but even an activity for groups is possible. For example, a class is divided into four groups and each group gets a different picture. The four pictures illustrate a simple story. Students in each group try to remember their picture. Then the teacher rearranges students into groups of four so that each student in one group knows one fourth of the story. They describe their picture to the others in the group and the whole group reconstructs and writes down the story. (Harmer, 1998, p. 88).

An information gap activity is possible to use with students of all levels from elementary to advanced as the language students produce during the activity can be either focused on a particular structure or it can be nearly unpredictable. This depends on the setting of the task, i.e. the input of the activity.

There are various ways to develop information gap activities. For example, they can be based on pictures: 1. Students in pairs get similar but not exactly the same pictures and they have to find out the differences. 2. One student in a pair has a picture and he describes it to the other, who has to draw it. 3. One student gets a set of several pictures; the other gets only one picture from the set. The student with one picture describes his picture to the other student who has to spot it in his set.

Other possibilities of creating an information gap activity are e.g. giving personal information or giving instructions (students in pairs have maps, there are various buildings such as hospital, restaurant, post office, etc, but each student knows only half of the locations of the buildings. They give each other instructions how to get to the buildings from a known place until each student knows locations of all buildings.) Even various surveys, questionnaires and 'Find someone who' activities can be considered as information gap activities.

Opinion gap activities are similar to information gap activities. The only difference is that students exchange opinions instead of information. Students are divided into pairs, the teacher gives them a problem and they have to find out what the other thinks about the problem and agree on one solution of the problem. *"Differences of opinion can either be the focus of a discussion, or an obstacle to be overcome so that a consensus can be reached."*

(Klippel, 1984, p.4) Students express their own attitudes and opinions, so the activity becomes quite personal and therefore motivating for the students to speak.

2.3.2 Role-play and simulation

As role-play and simulation have a lot in common, I decided to put them under one heading. They both somehow bring the real world into the classroom, using situations from the real world to provide students with meaningful practice. Thus, they both prepare students for situations that they might once encounter in real life.

It is not very simple to define role-play and simulation, as it seems that different authors have different opinions on what the difference between role-play and simulation is. Wingate (1993, p.42) distinguishes between role-play and simulation by describing role-play as an activity in which “*the students pretend to be someone else and do something which has been set for them to do*” and simulation as an activity in which students take part as themselves. This description corresponds with Gower, Phillips, and Walters (1995, p. 107), who claim that “*a simulation is slightly different from a role-play in that the students are not playing roles but being themselves.*”

However, other authors do not make a difference between role-play and simulation in this way. For example, Klippel (1984, p.121) states that “*...simulations are more highly structured and contain more diverse elements in their content and procedure.*” Role plays, on the other hand, “*often consist of short scenes, which can be realistic – as in acting out a shopping situation – or pure fantasy – as in pretending to interview a Martian on TV.*” (Klippel, 1984, p.121)

The most complex definition of simulation can be found in Jones (1982, p. 4-5) who defines it by stating three necessary elements that simulations must contain: reality of function, simulated environment and structure. ‘**Reality of function**’ means that students “*must mentally accept the function the simulation requires of them.*” (Jones, 1982, p.4) Students should stop thinking about themselves as students. They should try to imagine themselves to be shop assistants, policemen, or whatever role they get, and think according to it, rather than act the roles of farmers or policemen and think as students. Next, “*the environment must be simulated, otherwise it is not a simulation.*” (Jones, 1982, p.4) In real environment, we buy coffee in a shop, and then we go home and make ourselves a cup of coffee. However, students practising a conversation in the same situation do not spend their money and they do not go home with a packet of coffee in their pocket. “*In this respect, a*

simulation is safe; the outside world remains untouched, and real disaster cannot result from participant error.” (Jones, 1982, p.5) Finally, a ‘**structure**’ is required. The situation in which the teacher puts her students must be structured around some problem. Also, materials must be provided for students.

Further, Jones (1982, p.4) claims that “...*the reference to structure is a guide to distinguish between simulations and role play.*” According to him, role-play can be based on quite a simple situation, and therefore it does not need a structure.

Considering all this, a general conclusion can be made: simulation is usually more complex and structured; it may demand some background information or additional materials whereas role play can be based on quite a simple short situation, with all necessary information included in a role card.

As role-play can be very simple, it is suitable even for students at lower levels. Depending on the information on the role cards that students get, role-play can be used not only to give students fluency practice, but also even to try out language recently used in a less controlled way.

In simple role-play, the role cards can contain just basic information. Gowers, Phillips and Walters (1995, p. 105) describe a role-play in which one of the students travels to London and the other is a ticket clerk. The traveller’s role card includes information about the time he must be in London, information that he is hungry, and also the instruction to ask about the trains to London. The clerk’s card contains information about the time when the trains leave, about the necessity to change in Cambridge, and about the possibility to buy food on the train.

In more complex role-play, the role card can include extended information about the character such as age, appearance, or mood, and also some kind of conflict or a problem so that students have to negotiate in order to sort out the conflict.

If the teacher wants to prevent students from reading the cards to each other rather than acting their roles, it is a good idea to let students read and memorise the information on the cards and then collect them before the activity. Otherwise, students might stick to their cards too much. With more disciplined students, it might be enough to ask them to lay the role cards down on the table and look at them only when they cannot go on.

“*Role play helps many shy students by providing them with a mask.*” (Porter-Ladousse, 1987, p.7) Because they speak as someone else and not themselves, they do not need to be worried about what they say, or about the mistakes they make.

Simulations can bring students into almost any situation. Very often, it includes some kind of problem solving or decision taking. A very interesting type of simulation is a

‘survival’. Scrivener (1994, p.65) describes a survival that puts students into a forest. They are lost, their car is damaged, and someone is injured. Students are given a map and notes on their situation. Their task is to make a plan what to do.

Both simulation and role-play give students a chance to practise the language in specific situations. *“Learners must still aim to convey meanings effectively, but must also pay greater attention to the social context in which the interaction takes place.”* (Littlewood, 1981, p.20) They must consider what role they play and who they talk to and accordingly choose appropriate language forms. For example, a student playing a role of a boss will probably choose different language than a student playing the role of his employee. The boss can be very direct in what he says to the employee, but the employee will always wish to be as polite as possible. Through simulation and role-play, students can develop their sociolinguistic competence (see chapter 1.3.1). Also for this reason, role-plays and simulations are a good opportunity to rehearse before using the language outside the classroom.

Finally, role-plays and simulations can be even enjoyable. Especially the younger students might enjoy using their imagination, creating imaginary characters and situations.

2.3.3 Discussion

Discussion is another speaking activity that offers students an opportunity of purposeful verbal communication. Byrne (1987, p.59) defines discussion quite simply as *“any exchange of opinions or ideas.”* In a discussion students are themselves (they do not play a role) and they express their own ideas. (Wingate, 1993, p.42). Therefore, a discussion is probably the most difficult task for students, as they have no mask or role to hide themselves. In my opinion, discussions are suitable for students at higher levels for this reason.

As any communicative activity, a successful discussion needs an interesting topic. It is obvious that students will probably not speak if there is nothing to speak about. There are several ways to introduce the topic. It can be set up with a question, with a controversial or provocative statement, e.g. ‘Everyone is basically selfish.’ (Ur, Wright, 1992, p.10), with a text or a picture. A good way to introduce a topic is also a very short story or a description of a problematic situation. For example, instead of telling the students to discuss cheating at exams, the teacher can ask the students to imagine that they are supervising an important test and they see a student cheating. They get a list of several possible actions to take and they

have to decide what to do. After that, they may be brought into groups of four and asked to agree on one answer and then the situation can be discussed with the whole class.

This example joins the introduction of the topic with another important feature of a discussion, which is a task. As Harmer (1991, p.124) points out, *“one way to promote a discussion is to give students a task as a part of the discussion process.”* For Ur, it is very important, and even necessary to include a task in a discussion: *“When a group is given a task to perform through verbal interaction, all speech becomes purposeful, and therefore more interesting.”* (Ur, 1981, p.12)

In a discussion about school rules, the task can be making a list of students' own rules. Another example of a task can be ordering several given statements about smoking from the most to the least agreeable one. When discussing relationships, each group of students can be given a letter describing a personal problem and their task would be to discuss the problem, find a solution, and write an answer containing advice to the problem.

A common type of activity that usually contains a task is problem solving. Harmer, (1991, p.129) introduces it as a separate kind of activity. In my opinion, it can be seen as a type of a discussion. In problem solving, a problem or a puzzle is given, and the students are to find out and agree on a solution.

Klippel (1984, p.103) introduces an activity, in which students are invited to imagine themselves on a desert island. Their task is to agree on a list of eight things necessary to survive. They do this in pairs and then discuss their lists in bigger groups, agree on only eight things again, and then rank them in order of their importance.

It is advisable to put students in groups for a discussion as it raises the amount of speaking each student can get. In a whole class two or three talkative students might easily control the discussion whereas the others would be discouraged to contribute. Students can work in groups and a conclusion or feedback can be made with the whole class after that.

Provided that a discussion has an interesting topic and a task, it can be both enjoyable for the students and helpful in developing their speaking skills.

As all these kinds of speaking activities give students chance to use the target language communicatively, they are an important part of language learning and so they should not be neglected. They provide an opportunity to practise the language in a similar way to the one used outside the classroom. Actually, the students are 'rehearsing' for the real use.

Moreover, these activities offer other benefits. Both students and the teacher can get important feedback about what they have learnt so far. The teacher has time to listen to

students and find out which areas of language they have already mastered and which areas need some more work. Students can make sure that they can make use of the language they have learnt.

Finally, communicative speaking activities can be also enjoyable as they involve students' imagination and they are a good way to alter the usual classroom routines.

3. Thesis

Considering the theoretical facts and using my own learning and teaching experience, I designed my Professional Project to support the following thesis: Using student-student interaction in the classroom can lead to real communication in English among the students, provided that the tasks designed to promote the interaction are realistic, related to students' interests, and provide students with a reason to speak. In order to make these tasks effective, the teacher has to prepare and organize them carefully. Then, they can be very enjoyable for students and they can help to develop students' communicative skills.

4. Parts of the Paper

The Professional Project will contain three parts. In the first part, the theory and methodology of student-student interaction and speaking activities will be discussed, the second part will include the practical research. Finally, the results of theoretical and practical research will be discussed in the third part.

CHAPTER II

1. Basis for project design

The development of this Professional Project is based on Malamah-Thomas's, Celce-Murcia's, Brown's, Littlewood's, Klippel's and others' opinions on using student-student interaction in the classroom and the methodology of speaking activities.

If student-student interaction is to be successful, it is important that students not only speak, but also listen to each other, because, as Malamah-Thomas points out, "*interaction is a two way process.*" (1987, p.8)

If the interaction between students is successful, it leads to genuine communication. To achieve this, there must be some kind of reason for speaking and listening. Students must have a need to interact, there must be an information gap and students' task must be meaningful. Also, students must be interested in what is being said, and involved in the activity personally.

As the main aim of the activities in which students interact with each other is to achieve communication, the meaning of the language is more important than the form of the language. The main purpose of the activities is to get students express themselves fluently although the teacher will certainly do all she can so that the language students produce is as accurate as possible.

Using student-student interaction in the classroom brings along several advantages. It increases student talking time considerably, which means that students get much more practice than they would through teacher-student interaction. It allows students to be more active, which contributes to the effectiveness of learning. It enhances co-operation among the students, and thus contributes to the development of positive relationship between students.

When preparing the activity, the teacher should choose such topics that will be close to students' interests. To design activities, she should base them on situations that are similar to real life.

In the classroom, the teacher should provide students with appropriate language input, organise the activity and give instructions carefully, monitor the activity and then offer students sufficient feedback.

Familiarising with the experts' opinions suggested in Chapter I have raised the following questions:

What can the teacher do to make sure that the student-student interaction during the activity will really lead to genuine communication?

Under what conditions are students able to keep the language English?

Is the use of student-student interaction in the classroom enjoyable for students?

The Professional Project is developed to answer these questions.

2. Textbook evaluation

Before I started teaching, I had to get familiar with the textbook that was used in the two classes I chose for my Project. In these classes, the following textbooks were used:

Project English 2 by Tom Hutchinson, Oxford University Press, 1986

Project English 3 by Tom Hutchinson, Oxford University Press, 1987

Examining these textbooks enabled me to find out on what language level the students were, what vocabulary and language structures they already knew, and what kinds of speaking activities they were introduced to. I also wanted to know what topics the textbooks introduced.

Also, I had to consider whether the speaking activities in these textbooks were suitable for my project or whether I would have to design my own activities.

There are several opportunities for speaking in each unit of Project English 2. A lot of them are based on everyday situations corresponding with the age of the students such as inviting to a party, shopping, ordering a meal in a fast food, or making an interview. However, these speaking activities do not provide students with any communicative purpose. There is no information gap between students. Most of them ask students to act dialogues that are written in the book. In this case, students actually read the conversation rather than communicate. In some activities they have to ask and answer questions about some material in the textbook, but the problem is that both of them can see the material.

I could find only few activities that contained some kind of communicative element. There are two guessing games, in which one of students has to think of something and the other has to find out what it is by asking questions. Also, there is one classroom survey, in which students are asked to find out what their mates have or have not done.

Similarly, the only speaking activities that can be called communicative are surveys and guessing games in Project English 3. Otherwise, there are only activities in which students have to listen to a dialogue, make notes about it and then reconstruct it, or they have to role-play written dialogues. Again, these activities cannot be considered as communicative.

However, the topics in this textbook, including job interview, talking about ambitions, or a shopping dialogue, can be interesting enough for students at elementary school.

Having evaluated the textbooks, I decided to design my own activities. They should be related to the topics included in the textbooks and their level of difficulty should correspond with the students' level of language. Moreover, they should provide the students with a reason to talk; some kind of information gap should be included.

Also, I had to develop my own materials. To design my own activities and materials, I used the following resources:

Granger, Colin: Play games with English¹, Heineman Publishers, Oxford, 1993

Klippel, Friederike: Keep Talking, Cambridge University Press, 1984

Nolasco, Rob, and Lois Arthur: Conversation, Oxford University Press, 1987

3. Practical Implementation

I examined the project during my teaching practice that took place at elementary school in Ruprechtice from September to October 2001. I chose the groups in 8th and 9th grade as they had the most experience with English.

3.1 Class profiles

Class:	8B
Number of students:	18 (10 girls/8 boys)
Age:	13-14
Lessons per week:	3
Language level:	pre-intermediate
Textbook:	Project English 2

Comment

This class had been learning English for two years and this was their third one, so they knew all the basic tenses. They could create correct sentences quite well. They were quite a pleasant class to teach as they were interested in English and they liked to learn it. They had quite large vocabulary, which surprised me fairly. They were rather quiet, which, after all, proved as an advantage as there were 18 students. Also, they were reasonably obedient and they did all I asked them to do.

Class:	9A
Number of students:	14 (6 girls/8 boys)
Age:	14-15
Lessons per week:	3
Language level:	intermediate
Textbook:	Project English 3

Comment

Although this class was one year ahead of 8B, it looked exactly the other way round. They were not interested in English, they did not like to learn and that is why they were actually much weaker in it than 8B. They did not understand the English word order and tended to create sentences by translating them word by word. Also, they lacked vocabulary and had rather bad pronunciation. Moreover, they were quite talkative, but only in Czech, so sometimes it was difficult to maintain discipline. There were two clever boys that were better than the others, but as it was not fashionable to be good at English in this class, they did not want to show it too much.

3.2 Lesson plans

3.2.1 LESSON PLAN 1

CLASS: 8B

TOPIC: A day in London

AIMS: to practise asking about and giving information about places to visit
to extend the basic dialogue from the textbook

OBJECTIVES: students will plan their trip in London

MATERIALS: Project English 2 – student's book (see appendix, p.2), leaflets with
places to visit (see appendix, p.3-5),
flashcards with questions and phrases

THESIS FOCUS: As students will not see each other's leaflet, there will be an
information gap, which should provide students with a reason to talk.
The element of decision taking should make the task more interesting
and motivating. The activity is guided; students will be provided with

sufficient input before the communicative task in stage 4.

Consequently, they should be able to keep the language English during stage 4.

STAGE 1

TIME: 7 minutes

AIMS: to introduce the topic

to remind students of questions about places to visit such as “When is it open?”, “Where is it?”, “How much is it to get in?”, etc.

to introduce the question “What can you see in...?”

TECHNIQUE: whole class

The teacher says: “Imagine we are in London. Let’s make a trip. Where shall we go today?” (The teacher elicits some ideas where to go)

Students open the textbooks (see appendix, p. 2) and look at the leaflets in the textbooks.

The teacher says: “Let’s go to the ZOO.” She gets one student to ask questions about the ZOO and another student to answer them.

The teacher asks: “What can you see in the ZOO?”

“What can you see in Madame Tussaud’s?”

She elicits some answers and displays the flashcard with the question “What can you see in...?” on the board.

STAGE 2

TIME: 10 minutes

AIMS: to extend the basic dialogue

to introduce the questions “Do you like ...?”

“Do you want to go to ...?”

to introduce the phrase “Let’s (not) go there.”

TECHNIQUE: whole class, pair work

The teacher explains that they could go to the National Portrait Gallery and passes the leaflets (see appendix, p.3). She asks one student the same questions as in stage 1. Then she asks: “What can you see in the Gallery?”

The teacher gets students to find in the leaflet what they can see in the gallery (paintings), asks whether they like paintings and whether they would like to go to the gallery. Then she

puts the flashcards with the questions “Do you like ...?” , “Do you want to go to ...?” and with the phrase “Let’s (not) go there.” on the board.

Students practise this dialogue in pairs. They can use all the questions on the board.

STAGE 3

TIME: 7 minutes

AIM: to introduce the vocabulary students will need for the next stage

TECHNIQUE: whole class

The teacher explains that students are going to get some more leaflets with places in London (see appendix, p.4-5). Students are divided into pairs. Each student in a pair gets a different leaflet. Students to ask the teacher about any words they do not understand. She tells students not to show the leaflets to each other.

The teacher writes the words “famous”, “wax”, “architecture”, “antique art”, and “Crown Jewels” on the board and gets students to read it out loud.

STAGE 4

TIME: 10 minutes

AIMS: Students practise asking about and giving information about places to visit.

Students plan their trip in London.

TECHNIQUE: pair work

The teacher explains to students that they should use their leaflets (see appendix, p. 4-5) to plan a trip in London. Each pair can spend £ 9, so they must count how much their trip would cost. Students work in pairs. They ask each other about the places on their leaflets. They choose 3 or 4 places to visit. They can make notes about their decisions. The teacher monitors what students say.

STAGE 5

TIME: 10 minutes

AIM: to display the results of the previous stage

TECHNIQUE: whole class

The teacher gets some of the pairs to report on their decision.

REFLEXION:

STAGE 1

The students looked quite enthusiastic when I told them we would plan a trip in London. They knew quite a lot of places to go as we had been talking about London before. I was pleased that they remembered the places. Most of them also remembered the questions and their meaning, so there were no problems at this point. When I asked what they could see in the Zoo, some of them understood the question immediately and answered it. When I asked about Madame Tussaud's, they hesitated because they did not know the English word so I asked them to say it in Czech and then I wrote "wax figurines" on the board.

STAGE 2

We went through the questions very quickly as the students already started to look bored. They understood the new questions but it was evident that they did not understand the word "painting" so I pointed first at the leaflet (as there was a picture) and then on a picture on a wall and got them to guess the meaning.

When I asked them to ask about the leaflet in pairs, they did it, but a lot of them looked really uninterested and as I watched a few pairs, it was obvious that they did not really listen to what their partner was saying. They asked the questions, but both students in a pair could see the answer on the leaflet, so the student who asked did not really need to listen, because he already knew the answer. There was no information gap between the students in pairs, and no reason to communicate. That is why the students were uninterested.

However, this exercise was meant to prepare the students for stage 4. I did not notice any serious problems; the students could ask and answer the questions well.

STAGE 3

When I distributed the new leaflets, I asked the students which places they knew. They named The Tower and Madame Tussaud's. I asked them whether they knew what Westminster Abbey was, and they could guess from the picture that it was a "big church". When I asked them to find unknown words, they were quite unwilling to name any. I had to ask directly: "What does 'art' mean?" If they did not know, I tried to explain it in English. They were able to guess more than half of the words in this way and I gave the meaning of the rest in Czech.

STAGE 4

As I was explaining the task to the students, they started to look interested when I told them about the money. Some of them asked: “Are we going to get real money?” so I had to disappoint them at this point, but still the fact that they could decide about spending money added a lot of attraction to the task. This classroom was not very suitable for moving the students around as there were three heavy desks put together in each row so six students sat next to each other. Also the aisle between the desks was very narrow. That is why I let most of the students work with the person next to them.

This was quite a big class, so I did not have time to listen to one pair for a long time, but generally I could hear that most of the students could ask and answer the questions without any serious problems. Most of the students used only the questions and phrases that I gave them, but I could hear one girl saying: “Museum is boring, let’s not go there.” Therefore, I assume that the students had a chance to be creative. I could hear that most of the pairs were able to keep talking in English most of the time. This was not a problem for them because they prepared for the task in stage 2. Only when I heard some pairs counting the money in Czech, I realized that I had not given them any model to count the money. In spite of this, a few pairs could do it in English.

As the students did not know what was on their partners’ leaflets, they were interested in what their partners in pairs said. The information gap between the students made them listen to each other. Moreover, the interaction between the students was successful because they were able to plan their trip.

STAGE 5

The students kept talking longer than I had expected so I had to stop them as we were running out of time. When I asked them to tell the others what trip they planned, most of them were able to do this in English with a little help. I asked only four or five pairs to do so, because there were too many pairs. One pair really surprised me, as they said they would go to Madame Tussaud’s and then they would go to Mc Donald’s and spend the rest of the money on hamburgers and chips. I did not mind, as it seemed that they would really enjoy a trip like that.

CONCLUSION

I think this activity was successful as the aims were fulfilled. The students were able to plan their trip in London in English and they quite enjoyed planning it.

I think that a comparison of stages 2 and 4 proves the importance of an information gap. In stage 2 the students were not interested in the task and did not see the reason why they should ask. In stage 4, they were quite happy about asking the same questions again as they did not know what places their partners had on their leaflets. Because they prepared for the task in stages 2 and 3, they were able to ask and answer the questions and also decide where to go in English.

The element of decision making added to the necessity to communicate. I think that the fact that two students decided to go to Mc Donald's proves that they got really involved in the task.

In a guided activity, it is very important to provide the students with some kind of language input to prepare them for a task. I provided them with a model dialogue how to ask questions about the places and most of them kept talking in English. On the other hand, I did not give them any model how to count the money. Consequently, most of them used Czech to count the money. This was actually my mistake because I planned that the students would have to count how much money they would spend, but I did not provide them with any language input for this. Therefore, my suggestion for further teaching practice, especially with students at a lower level, is to provide students with a language model for everything the teacher wants students to say in English (in case the language students will use is predictable).

3.2.2 LESSON PLAN 2

CLASS: 8B

TOPIC: Asking for and giving directions

AIMS: to introduce phrases "Excuse me"

"How can I get to...?"

"Can you tell me how to get to...?"

to practise asking for and giving directions

OBJECTIVES: students will be able to ask for and give directions

MATERIALS: Project English 2 - grammar book (see appendix, p.7) and textbook

(see appendix, p.6), black board, handouts (see appendix, p.8-9), chalk

THESIS FOCUS: As each student in a pair will know the location of different buildings on a map, there will be an information gap between students. The effectiveness of the information gap will be ensured by getting students in pairs to sit opposite each other. The activity is guided; the first three

stages should prepare students for stage 4 so that they are able to keep talking in English. Use of student-student interaction will increase student talking time, which is especially important in this class as there are 18 students.

STAGE 1

TIME: 12 minutes

AIMS: to remind students of the directions (“Go straight on”, “Take the first turning on the right”, etc...)
to follow the directions
to introduce the topic
to give directions

TECHNIQUE: whole class, pair work

The teacher explains that she will take students to a secret place, but they must find out themselves what place it is.

Students open the textbooks (see appendix, p.6)

The teacher explains that they start the journey in front of the Tower. She gives directions.

(“Go along Lower Thames Street. Go over London Bridge. Then go straight on. Take the second turning on the right. You will see the Imperial War Museum on your left. Go along Lamberth Road. Take the first turning on the right. You will come to Westminster Bridge. Go over the bridge, then go straight on. Where are you?”)

Students follow the directions. Students say where they are. (Buckingham Palace)
Students do the same in pairs; each of them gives directions to one place. The other has to find out what place it is.

STAGE 2

TIME: 10 minutes

AIMS: to fill in dialogues in grammar books (see appendix, p.7)

to introduce phrases “Excuse me.”, “How can I get to...?”, “Where is ...”,
etc...
to provide a model dialogue

TECHNIQUE: individual work, whole class

Students open the grammar books (see appendix, p.7). The teacher asks them to find the railway station on the map and explains that there are two people at the station. Students complete their conversation.

The whole class checks the answers.

Then the teacher elicits the phrases and their meaning. She asks the students whether they noticed how every conversation started, how the people asked for directions, etc..

The teacher puts the phrases on the blackboard:

1. "Excuse me."
2. "How can I get to...?" or "Where is the...?" or "Can you tell me how to get to...?"
3. "Go straight on", "Take the first turning on the right", etc...
4. "Thank you"

STAGE 3

TIME: 7 minutes

AIM: to prepare students for stage 4

TECHNIQUE: whole class

The teacher tells students to imagine they are in front of the town hall in Liberec and says she is a stranger. She asks one student: "Excuse me. How can I get to the bus stop?" She gets the student to give directions.

STAGE 4

TIME: 10 minutes.

AIM: to practise asking for and giving directions orally

TECHNIQUE: pair work

Students work in pairs. Each student in a pair gets a different handout (see appendix, p.8-9). On the handout, there is a map of a town. There are various places such as cinema, hotel, bank, etc..., but each student can see only half of the places on his map. He has got a list of the other half of the places on his handout. Students' task is to ask their partner for directions, find the location of the other half of places and write the names of the places in the map.

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STAGE 5

TIME: 5 minutes

AIM: to check the results of students' work

TECHNIQUE: whole class

Students in pairs look at each other's handouts to see whether they really found the location of each place. The teacher asks volunteers to role-play the dialogue in front of the class.

REFLECTION

STAGE 1

Although we had been doing a similar activity in the previous lesson, a lot of the students were not able to follow the instructions and they gave wrong answers. Therefore, I repeated the directions once more, this time checking after each sentence whether they were on the right place on the map. This helped a bit. After that I gave directions for another place to make sure that they managed to follow the directions. This time, most of the students could find the right place on the map.

However, they had serious problems to give the directions themselves and as I heard several pairs speaking in Czech, I asked them to stop and I put the phrases (go straight on, take the first turning to the left, etc...) on the blackboard. After that, most of the students were able to give directions quite well.

I had to put one girl and one boy together. They both were quite resentful of working with each other, but, at last, they started as well.

STAGE 2

I left the phrases on the black board so that they could help the students a bit in completing the dialogue in the grammar book. When we checked it together, most of the answers the students gave were correct.

They could also find the phrases that I asked about in the dialogue. I only wrote the phrases "Excuse me.", "How can I get to...?", "Where is ...", and finally "Thank you", because the phrases for giving directions were already on the blackboard. Finally, I asked them to translate the phrases that I wrote on the blackboard to be sure that they knew the meaning.

STAGE 3

I asked one boy to give directions from the town hall to the nearest bus stop. Looking at the phrases on the black board, he could give the directions, although he was quite slow. However, the other students did not pay much attention to him. When I realized this, I explained to them that they would do something similar in pairs in a while so they should find out how to do it. This made them a little bit more interested. Then I asked one girl to be a stranger and ask another girl for directions to a place she liked. She asked for the directions to the Tesco. With some help, the other girl was able to give the directions.

STAGE 4

First I asked the students to make pairs with the person behind them so that they would sit opposite each other. They did not know who should move so I had to go round the classroom and specify which students should turn around and work with the person behind them. This took more time than I had expected.

The students quite liked the maps, which made them interested in the task. When I explained the task, they started immediately. Most of them could describe the way quite well as well as follow the directions although it was not always grammatically correct. For example, one boy kept saying “How I get to...” instead of “How can I get to...” and another student said “Take the first turning left” instead of “to the left.” However this did not change the meaning so I did not interrupt them.

As the students were sitting opposite each other, they had no chance to look at each other’s map. Therefore, they really had to listen in order to find the places on their list; genuine communication took place between the students. Some students could find all the places, others found four or five places. As they were able to give directions as well as follow them, and find the places, the interaction between the students was successful.

In the end, the task became bit too long. Each student had to find six places, which meant that they had to say: “Excuse me, how can I get to...” six times. Consequently, some students looked slightly bored in the end. It would have been better if each student had to find only four places.

STAGE 5

After the students compared their maps, I asked them whether they got it all right. More than half of the students said that they found all the places. The rest of the students found four or five of them. Therefore, I would say they were quite successful.

As I had expected, there were no volunteers to perform the dialogue in front of the class, so I had to appoint two girls. The first one asked for the directions to the swimming pool. The other said: “Take the second turn to right.” At this point, I stopped her and asked the class to correct her. One boy said: “Take the second turning to the right”. Then I let the girl continue. She could describe the rest of the way without mistakes. Then the first girl thanked her.

I asked one more pair to perform the dialogue. This time, there was no mistake.

CONCLUSION

In stage 1, the students were not able to give directions at first, although they had been able to follow them when I gave directions. They could not remember what I had said; they needed to see the phrases. As soon as I provided a language model, they were able to give the directions. This event illustrates how important it is to provide students with a language model.

The first three stages were meant to prepare the students for stage 4 and, in my opinion, they served their purpose quite well. Although the students made some mistakes, they were able to ask for and give the directions in English and most of them could find the places according to the directions.

As I asked the students to sit opposite each other, they had no chance to see their partner’s map and therefore they really had to listen to their partner if they wanted to find the places. There was a genuine information gap between the students. Therefore, the interaction between the students led to real communication.

Compared to stage 3, there were many more students involved in talking during stage 4. This made the students not only more active, but also more involved and more interested in what was happening in the classroom.

3.2.3 LESSON PLAN 3

CLASS: 9. A

TOPIC: Buying and selling food

AIMS: to introduce dialogues about buying and selling food

to practise the dialogues orally

to revise vocabulary connected with food

OBJECTIVES: students will be able to buy and sell food

MATERIALS: cassette recorder, tape (Project English 3 – see Appendix, p.15), a dialogue about shopping cut into separate sentences (see appendix, p.10), pictures of food, empty wrappers and containers of food (students' homework is to bring them), Project English 3 (see appendix, p.11),

THESIS FOCUS: Students will role-play shop assistants and customers. As the shop assistant will not know what the customers want to buy, there will be an information gap between them, which will ensure the necessity to communicate. As it is a guided activity, students will prepare for the communicative stage during several preparatory exercises. This will ensure that they will be able to carry out their roles in English. A situation that is similar to every day situations should add to the meaningfulness of the task.

STAGE 1

TIME: 10 minutes

AIMS: to introduce the topic

listening for detail

to revise vocabulary of food

TECHNIQUE: whole class, individual work

The teacher asks students whether they sometimes buy food and asks them what they buy. Students give their ideas. The teacher explains that they are going to listen to some people in a village shop. Students' task is to note down what the people bought. (No.1: a pound of cheese, bread, margarine; No.2: honey, marmalade, cucumber; No.3: chicken, milk; No. 4: strawberries, two yogurts)

When they finish listening the teacher checks their answers and then asks them whether they heard what the shop assistant said in the beginning, what the people in the shop said, etc...

STAGE 2

TIME: 10 minutes

AIMS: to introduce phrases "Can I have..., please?", "Anything else?", "Here you are", "Is that all?", etc...

to put the jumbled dialogue in the correct order

to prepare students for stage 4

TECHNIQUE: pair work, whole class

Each pair gets strips of paper with a shopping dialogue on it (see appendix, p.10).
There is one sentence on each strip. Students put the dialogue in the right order.
The whole class checks the correct order of the dialogue.
The teacher elicits the following phrases, checks whether students know their meaning and writes them on the black board.

“Can I help you?”

“Can I have..., please?”

“I would like..., please.”

“Here you are.”

“Is that all?”

“Anything else?”

“We don’t sell...”

“How much is it altogether?”

“That’s ..., please.”

STAGE 3

TIME: 5 minutes

AIMS: to write a shopping list
to revise vocabulary of food

TECHNIQUE: individual work

The teacher asks several students what meal they like and what food they need to cook it. Then each student chooses one meal and writes a shopping list containing all he needs to cook his meal. They can have a look at the shopping list in the textbook (see appendix, p.11) to see what it should look like.

When they finish, the teacher asks a few students what they chose to cook and what they wrote on their shopping lists.

STAGE 4

TIME: 15 minutes

AIMS: students will practise dialogues about buying and selling food

TECHNIQUE: flexible pair work

Approximately half of students role-play shop assistants. (There should be 5-6 shops).
Each of them prepares his shop on one desk. They make a card with the name of their shop

(greengrocer's, bakery, grocer's, butcher's). The teacher provides a lot of small pictures of food. Students take out empty wrappers and cardboard boxes, which they were asked to bring, and put them to appropriate shops.

The students who play customers go around the classroom and buy the food they wrote on their shopping lists in stage 3. They take the "food" (pictures or wrappers) they bought with them.

After 7 minutes, students who role-played customers change roles with shop assistants.

The teacher monitors.

STAGE 5

TIME: 5 minutes

AIMS: to provide feedback for stage 4

TECHNIQUE: whole class

The teacher asks several students what they wrote on their shopping lists and what they bought. Two students role-play the dialogue between a customer and a shop assistant in front of the class.

REFLEXION

STAGE 1

Some of the girls said they went shopping with their mothers, and they could name quite a lot of items of food. Most of the boys seemed uninterested in this discussion, which was understandable.

It was rather hard for the students to understand the dialogues I played to them. The first time I played it, they looked puzzled. They were not used to listening and this was probably too quick for them. Next time I stopped the cassette player after each dialogue. Consequently, I could see that some of the students could note down several things. I played the cassette once more. This time, nearly all the students wrote at least something. When I asked them to give me the answers, more than half of them were correct.

When I asked what the people in the shop had said, only two good students were able to give some examples such as "Can I have a pound of cheese?" It seemed that the other students focused only on the items of food, as the task was quite hard for them. This did not matter that much because they would deal with the same phrases in the next stage.

STAGE 2

This task was much easier than the listening task in stage 1 for the students. I would probably do this exercise before the listening task if I taught this lesson again, because it is easier for the students to understand the dialogue when they read it. If they had read it first, they would have been able to do the listening task better. They would have known what to expect.

As I was monitoring their work, I could see that most of them found the beginning of the dialogue quite quickly and understood the sentences of the dialogue. When we checked it together, most of the students agreed on the same order of the sentences. Only two pairs swapped the two sentences in which the customer asks for something. (“Could I have a pound of cheese, please?” and “Yes, a loaf of bread, please.”) These two sentences were actually interchangeable.

Because I did not collect the strips with the dialogue, it was easy for the students to tell how the customer asks for something, how the shop assistant offers him to buy something else, etc... Also, I could see that most of the students understood the meaning of the phrases.

STAGE 3

The students were getting a bit impatient because the day before I had told them we would have shops and shop assistants. They asked: “When will we play shop-assistants?”, and they were unwilling to write the shopping lists. So I had to explain that in real life it is better to write a list of what people want to buy beforehand because it saves time.

I forgot to tell them to open their textbooks when I asked them to write their shopping lists. Then I noticed that especially two or three weaker students had problems to write anything because they lacked vocabulary. Therefore, I told them to open their books and look at the shopping list there. Then they got on better.

I asked two students what they had decided to cook and what they had written on their lists. The first one said he would cook a chicken with potatoes. On his shopping list, he wrote chicken, potatoes, oil, salt, and vegetable. The other student decided to ‘cook’ sandwiches, and he had bread, butter, ham, cheese, and tomatoes on his shopping list.

STAGE 4

I did not manage to organise setting up the shops well. I appointed the shop assistants and then I told them to set up the shops (I told each shop assistant which shop he or she

should prepare. There were three grocery shops, one butcher's shop, one bakery and two green grocer's shops). The rest of the students brought their wrappers and boxes and then they were just sitting and waiting. It would have been better to ask each pair to set up one shop (so that all the students would have been occupied), and appoint the roles afterwards.

The students who role-played customers had to start interacting with the students who role-played shop assistants if they wanted to get the food they had on their lists. The shop assistants did not know what the customers would want so they had to listen to them. Therefore, there was a reason to interact; there was an information gap.

Most of the students had to go to two or three shops in order to buy everything on their lists. The interaction that took place between the customers and the shop assistants was usually quite short. I noticed that they kept their turns as short as possible. For example, they hardly ever said: "Could I have a loaf of bread, please?" Instead, they said "A loaf of bread, please." However, this did not matter, as it was quite natural to use shorter utterances. Moreover, most of them managed to speak in English. This motivated the students very much, as they were quite weak at English and now they were able to communicate. The feeling of success raised their motivation.

I heard some students speak in Czech a few times, but when I came closer and reminded them to speak English, they were able to continue in English. They were probably just lazy to speak in English; they did not have any serious problems. This incident helped me to realize that the role of the teacher as a monitor is very important.

There was one girl who did not want to get up. She said her legs hurt but in my opinion she did not want to get involved in the activity, as she was rather bad at English. I made her run one of the grocer's shops. I noticed that one boy came to her shop and as she did not react he said angrily: "Ted' musíš říct *Can I help you?*!" He actually made her interact with him. Then he helped her when she attempted to say the price. When a new "customer" came, she was more willing to interact and could manage on her own. In this way, the boy spontaneously helped the girl to carry out her role.

Most of the students really enjoyed this activity. They did not like English very much, but they did not consider this as "learning", because it was something people do every day in real life. That is why they were not as passive as usual.

STAGE 5

I asked three students to tell the class what was on their shopping list and show what they bought. One girl said there were potatoes, meat, onions, flour, oil, and salt on her

shopping list. She managed to buy everything except oil, because there was no oil in any shop. The other two students managed to buy everything.

Then I got two boys to role-play the dialogue between a customer and a shop assistant in front of the class. Although they made a few minor mistakes (such as “Pound of meat, please.” instead of “A pound of meat, please.”), I did not correct them, because I did not want to spoil the spirit of success that was in the classroom.

CONCLUSION

In my opinion, this lesson was quite successful. In spite of the fact that this class was quite weak, all the students were able to buy and sell food in English in the end. As customers, they were able to say what they wanted to buy, and the students who role-played shop assistants were able to understand them and give them what they wanted. Although the language the students used was quite limited, they were able to get the meaning across and communicate in English. This was also because the activity was guided; they were provided with a language model for everything they needed to say and they did several preparatory exercises before stage 4.

I intended to raise students’ motivation by giving them a rather easy task in which they would be able to succeed. This seemed to work well. Although this class is usually rather passive, the students were really eager to carry out their roles in stage 4.

The use of a situation similar to real life seemed to add to the attractiveness of the task. It was very natural for the students to interact in such situation and they enjoyed it very much.

As the students needed each other in order to carry out their roles (the customer needed the shop assistant in order to buy food), it made them help each other quite spontaneously. It proved that the use of student-student interaction facilitates co-operation and that the students can learn from each other.

3.2.4 LESSON PLAN 4

CLASS: 8. B

TOPIC: Jobs

AIMS: to ask for and give reasons

to express agreement or disagreement

to revise and practise vocabulary related to jobs

OBJECTIVES: students in groups will be able to rank jobs according to

importance

students will be able to give reasons why a particular job is important

MATERIALS: a picture (see appendix, p.14), handouts (see appendix, p.12), strips of paper with names of two jobs on each (see appendix, p.13), black board, chalk

THESIS FOCUS: Students do not know their classmates' opinion on the importance of particular jobs, there is an opinion gap, which will provide students with a reason to interact and communicate. It is a free activity; the language that students will need is unpredictable although there are some phrases that the teacher can provide. It will be interesting to watch whether and how well students can cope with the task.

STAGE 1

TIME: 5 minutes

AIMS: to introduce the topic

TECHNIQUE: whole class

The teacher displays a picture (see appendix, p.14) of a woman sitting in front of a computer and asks students what her job could be. Then she asks whether her job is important and why.

STAGE 2

TIME: 8 minutes

AIMS: to revise vocabulary related to jobs

to prepare students for the next stage

TECHNIQUE: pair work

Each pair gets a handout (see appendix, p.12) with twelve descriptions of jobs and twelve names of jobs. Students have to match the names of the jobs with the descriptions. The whole class checks the results.

STAGE 3

TIME: 12 minutes

AIMS: to give reasons why particular jobs are important

to prepare for the next stage

TECHNIQUE: individual work, whole class

- A. The teacher asks students which job they regard as the most important and why. She elicits the following phrases and writes them on the black board:
 “He/she is important because...”
 “Without him, we can’t/won’t...”
- B. Students are divided into groups of six. Each student in a group gets a strip of paper with names of two different jobs (see appendix, p.13). Different students in one group have different jobs. Students work individually. Each student thinks of at least one reason why the two jobs are important and writes it on his strip of paper.

STAGE 4

TIME: 15 minutes

AIMS: to express agreement/disagreement

to give reasons, to argue

to defend one’s opinion

to rank the twelve jobs in order of importance

TECHNIQUE: whole class, group work

- A. The teacher explains to students that they have to rank the twelve jobs from the most to the least important. She asks one student which job he regards as the most important. Then she says: “I don’t agree” (she mimes disagreement) and puts the phrase on the board. She checks that students understand the meaning. The she provides or elicits other phrases such as:
 “I don’t think so”
 “I think that...”
 “I agree with...because...”
 “...[job] is more important than...[job]”
- B. Students work in groups. Their task is to rank the twelve jobs according to their importance. First, each student gives reasons why his two jobs are important. Then, the whole group discusses the rank of the jobs.

STAGE 5

TIME: 5 minutes

AIMS: to report on the results of group work

TECHNIQUE: whole class

The groups report on the rank of jobs they agreed upon. Then, the whole class agrees on one rank.

REFLECTION

STAGE 1

The students seemed interested in the picture. Some of them could guess that the woman in the picture was a reporter, whereas others insisted that she was a secretary. When I asked why a reporter is important, the students hesitated a little. Finally, one boy said: “He brings us news.” To involve more students, I invited them to give examples of other jobs and say why they are important. First, I had to encourage the students because they were quite shy. After a while, they named about five or six jobs and some of the students could give quite nice reasons such as: “Actors give us fun”. Finally they looked a bit more interested so this stage fulfilled its aim.

STAGE 2

I did not expect any problems at this stage, but after I distributed the worksheets, some students started to ask about vocabulary. I asked the whole class to stop working and asked them which words they did not know. They asked about “law”, “design”, “engines”, and some others. I explained the meaning of these words and then the students continued. While I was monitoring, I could see that some students interchanged two or three jobs. However, we went through the exercise with the whole class afterwards, so they had a chance to find out the right solution.

STAGE 3

I was afraid that the students would not be able to speak without any preparation and that is why I included this task before the speaking activity. As there were 18 students, it was possible to make three groups of six. I had to explain that although they were in groups, at first they would have to work individually. I gave the students the two phrases and then I asked them to write why the jobs on their papers were important. It was interesting to observe that some of the students used the phrases whereas others wrote something else. Unfortunately, most of the students did not have dictionaries; they would have been very helpful. I was the only source of the words they needed, which was not sufficient as there

were so many students. If I taught this lesson again, I would probably ask the students to bring their dictionaries.

STAGE 4

The students could guess the meaning of “agree” quite easily. Even the other phrases were not a problem. Then I asked the groups to rank the jobs.

As the language the students might have used in this task was unpredictable and I could not provide the students with language for everything they used, I was afraid that it would be too hard for them to express themselves in English immediately. That is why I wanted them to prepare their reasons beforehand. First, each student gave reasons why the two jobs on his paper were important. As they prepared this, they were able to give reasons in English. However, the other students in groups did not react to what was being said, some of them even did not listen. However, this it was probably not their mistake. I actually did not tell them that they should give their opinion on the reasons their classmates prepared. Perhaps they did not react just because they did not know they were expected to react. From this event, I learned that the way of setting up a task and giving instructions can influence the course of the task and, moreover, it can even influence whether and what kind of interaction will take place between the students. Therefore, it is very important that, before the lesson, the teacher thinks over what she actually wants students to do and prepares the instructions accordingly.

As the students started ranking the jobs, they were interested and listened to what their classmates were saying. To complete the task, they had to find out what the other students in the group thought, therefore there was a good reason to speak. Not all the students were able to speak only in English. This class was not used to fluency activities like this one and especially for the weaker students this task was slightly above their abilities. However, I kept reminding the groups to speak English. One boy got too excited when his classmate did not want to accept his point of view. He shouted:” Ale farmář je přece mnohem důležitější než herec, bez farmáře umřeš hlady!” I told him to repeat it in English. He said:“ Farmer is more important than actor. Without farmer, we have no food and we die.” I pointed out that if he tried, he could speak English. Then, this group continued in English for a while.

Those students who tried to speak English could speak only slowly and with a lot of hesitation; it was very difficult for them to think of what to say and how to say it in English at once. They also made quite a lot of mistakes, which was natural as they really struggled hard in order to say at least something. Very often, someone attempted to say something, and as he saw that the others did not understand, he used Czech to explain what he wanted to say

before. Sometimes, the others tried to translate it afterwards. However, the fact that they at least tried to communicate in English was more important than the fact that they made a lot of mistakes.

Another problem was the size of groups. I discovered that six in each group was too much. In each group, one or two students did not participate much. They just waited for the others to sort out the rank of the jobs. Next time, I would put the students in groups of four and ask them to rank only seven or eight jobs, because the task became a bit too long in the end.

STAGE 5

There were too many students in the classroom to let them all speak, so I asked one student to write the names of the jobs on the black board. Then, I asked one student from each group to report on their decision. I wrote marks for each job (1 for the most important) and I asked the students to count the results. It was curious to see how the groups ranked the jobs. They all agreed that a doctor was the most important whereas a secretary was the least important. The order of the other jobs was variable.

CONCLUSION

Although I intended the tasks in stages 2 and 3 as a preparation for stage 4, it was not always easy for the students to express themselves. This was a free activity; the language was unpredictable, so I could not provide everything the students needed although I gave them some phrases. This task was much harder than the tasks in previous lessons where the students got a model for everything they needed to say. However, those students who tried hard were able to keep the language English, which was very valuable. In my opinion, they would improve their speaking skills gradually if they were exposed to such tasks more often.

Because I did not tell the students that they should react somehow when their classmates read what they had prepared, they did not do so. Therefore, clear detailed instructions are very important, as they can influence the course of the interaction that takes place between the students.

In order to rank the jobs, the students had to listen to each other; there was an opinion gap among them, which gave them a reason to speak. However, it was not always easy to make them use English. It is necessary that the teacher keeps reminding and encouraging the students to speak in English. In this way, the role of the teacher is very important. Sometimes, there was a communication breakdown when the students attempted to

say something, but then they stopped because they did not know how to continue. This breakdown usually made the students to use Czech in order to explain what they attempted to say.

In my opinion, this lesson was successful. The students quite enjoyed the lesson, and they were able to rank the jobs in order of importance. Although not all the students spoke in English all the time, the fact that at least some students were able to communicate in English freely could have been a very valuable experience for them.

CHAPTER III

1. Conclusion

After familiarizing myself with the theory of student-student interaction, I designed the Professional Project to verify the thesis that employing student-student interaction in the classroom can give students a chance to communicate in English if they are provided with a reason to speak, if the task is realistic, and if the topic of the speaking activity appeals to their interests.

Consequently, the lesson plans included in Chapter II were designed in accordance with the thesis, following the methodology experts' suggestions. The practical model was developed in order to justify or reject the thesis and test the methodology suggested by the experts.

I tested the practical model in the 8th and 9th form of elementary school. After each lesson, I also consulted the results of the lesson with my mentor teacher. Her comments, my own observation of the students, and reflection on my lessons led me to the following conclusions:

The interaction between the students was successful and led to genuine communication if there was a reason to speak. The reason to speak was provided by an information or opinion gap between the students. If the students had to share some kind of information or opinion, they needed to speak and listen to each other to bridge the information gap. Then, the interaction between the students resulted in communication and the task became meaningful for them. Moreover, such a meaningful task became more interesting for the students.

Whether the students were able to keep the language English depended on the language input to a large extent. In guided activities, it was possible to provide some kind of a model dialogue that the students could use while working on their task. Consequently, it was quite easy for them to speak English. The language input could be also provided by some preparatory exercises so that the students could practise the language in a controlled way first. In guided activities, this was the most effective way to make sure that the students would not use their mother language to complete the task.

In the free activity, the language was unpredictable and I could not provide input for everything the students wanted to say. Then, it was harder for them to keep the language English. In this case, it was particularly important that I kept reminding the students to speak

English. For those students who tried to keep the language English (not all of them did), it was a very valuable experience to see that they really could communicate in a foreign language.

In guided activities, the language that the students produced was sometimes correct, and more often there were minor mistakes. However, these mistakes were not serious and they did not change the meaning of what was being said. These mistakes did not cause any break of communication. Moreover, the students were able to express themselves quite fluently.

As the free activity was much more difficult for the students, they made more mistakes. Sometimes, the students attempted to say something, but they did not know how to continue, and the communication broke down. In these cases, they often used Czech to explain what they wanted to say. Fluency was another problem. The students had to think hard what to say and how to say it; therefore, it took them more time to express themselves. They often hesitated before they said something.

I did not teach enough lessons to be able to observe the development of communicative skills among the students. However, I believe that if they were engaged in communicative activities regularly, their ability to express themselves fluently would increase gradually and it would also help them to develop communicative skills.

The success of the use of student-student interaction can be influenced by the way the teacher organizes the activity. If students working in pairs have different pieces of information on their handouts, it is advisable to make them sit opposite each other so that they are prevented from looking to each other's paper. It is easier to maintain the information gap between them.

Moreover, giving instructions can influence the successful course of student-student interaction. The teacher must be clear about when and how she wants students to interact, and she must give students instructions accordingly. If she expects them to interact, but she does not tell them, they might not perform according to her expectations. Therefore, it is advisable for the teacher to decide what exactly she wants students to do, and work out the instructions in advance.

To design the tasks for the students, I used topics from everyday life that the students were familiar with. These topics seemed to work well to attract students' attention. In my opinion, these topics were suitable because the students did not need to think what to say, but only how to say it. The fact that the students were familiar with the topics ensured that it was easy for the students to talk about them.

I verified that using student-student interaction brings certain advantages. Definitely, it raises the amount of student talking time. Also, students are more active, and therefore involved in learning. Finally, students can help to each other and learn from each other naturally during student-student interaction.

Considering all these facts, I can state that my experience with teaching confirmed the experts' opinions suggested in Chapter I. The results of the Project proved that the use of student-student interaction can offer students opportunities to use English communicatively, as long as the teacher involves students in a task that is realistic, has an interesting topic and provides students with a reason to speak.

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